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Avoid Application Form Errors

Are you about to apply for a job? Simply having an employer's name and making immediate contact to request an interview often isn't enough to ensure the employer will grant you an interview.

Some employers don't schedule job interviews until they've received application forms. They use these to select the people they want to see first.

An application for employment is more than a formal means of applying for a job, it is really a test all by itself — particularly when the application is to be returned by mail. The employer will not have personal contact with you. You must accurately present your strengths to get the interview you seek.

Also, an incomplete, soiled, misspelled, or torn application likely will make a poor first impression, particularly compared to others for the same job.

When you receive an application, find out if you can fill it out at home. This way you can use a typewriter, or take whatever time is needed to print, to provide information clearly and neatly.

Some employers believe applicants who complete forms in a hurry, who don't pay attention to the instructions or other details of the forms, or whose handwriting can't be read, will carry these same poor traits into the job.

Of course, the longer you take to return the application form to the employer, the more risk the job will be filled before you get it back. (If you decide to take the time at home, you may want to ask the employer if you can leave behind a brief fact sheet in the interim.)

Read the application form carefully all the way through **before** you fill it out. Then you'll know what information goes where without having to guess, or erase. Write detailed answers to questions on a separate piece of paper, if you believe the details are important enough to justify the extra effort.

Following are some pointers on the types of questions you likely will be asked.

Name

Believe it or not, this sometimes can cause a problem to an employer. For example, an applicant might have had a name change because of legal action, or through marriage. The married name for a woman who worked under her maiden name may be unknown to the former employer listed as a reference.

Address

One or two addresses — perhaps permanent and temporary — usually are requested. If you are a student planning to work away from home during the summer, include an address where you can be reached at any time, or from which mail will be forwarded. Zip codes are a must.



Other publications on resumes and applications

Personal Data Record
(DWSJ-4937-P)
Thoughts on Resumes
(DWSJ-4658-P)
Resume Writing—A Basic Guide
(DWSJ-9433-P)

Publications on related topics

INTERVIEWING

Keys to Successful Interviewing
(DWSJ-6951-P)
Hidden Elements of Interviewing
(DWSJ-9484-P)
Informational Interviewing
(DWSJ-9407-P)

JOB SEARCH

Tips on Finding Summer Jobs
(DWSJ-5641-P)
Job Search Issues
(DWSJ-8456-P)
Where to Look for Job Opportunities
(DWSJ-9467-P)

DWSJ-5913-P (R. 07/2003)

Telephone

Employers frequently contact applicants by telephone. It is very important to list a number where you always can be reached. The best hours for calling should be shown if you are away from the number for extended periods.

Social Security Number

Obtaining a Social Security number is easy, and you will need one, regardless of age. You cannot be required to provide your Social Security number on the job application. However, once hired you must provide the number to your employer in order to be paid and to have your Social Security, state and federal tax withholding applied to correct accounts.

Type of Work Desired

How you answer this question is very important. Find out ahead of time what openings exist and apply for the vacancies for which you're qualified. Do not undersell your talents. Be specific and don't apply for "general work" or "anything." Analyze what you can do—drive a vehicle, be a trades helper, type, be a laboratory aide, or repair autos, for example. Other jobs may require the occupant to have skills of persuasion or an ability to take risks.

Set your goals high while being prepared to take a lower-paying or less-desirable job for now, if necessary—at least you will have moved from the status of "outsider" to "insider."

Driver's License

The ability to drive can be a deciding factor in being chosen for some jobs. An applicant who can operate a vehicle with a manual gear shift may have a better advantage.

If you don't have a license but plan to get one, tell the employer you are applying for a license as soon as possible.

Previous Employment at This Firm

Any attempt to hide previous employment usually will be discovered when records are checked.

Salary Expected

Try to find out in advance the salary structure of the firm. Newspaper advertisements and employment counselors can help in this respect.

Because most teenagers have had little work experience, they usually are paid the prevailing minimum wage. Be realistic. Remember that the employer will base the pay on your value to the company, not on what salary you say you need.

Wisconsin Job Centers will be able to tell you the current state and federal minimum wage rates, or

you may write to the Equal Rights Division, Department of Workforce Development, 201 E. Washington Avenue, Madison, WI 53702. Ask for a copy of the **"Wisconsin Minimum Wage Rates Poster"** (publication ERD-9247-P).

Shift Desired/Hours Available for Work

A new worker may not get and should not expect a choice of hours. Many large multi-shift firms have a "shift preference" system, and most new employees must accept second or third shifts. Premium pay usually is provided for these shifts, however.

How Will You Travel to Work?

This question may be asked because:

Public transportation may not be available, and workers without cars will have to rely on others to drive them. If the driver of your car has a poor attendance record, so will you.

If you live a considerable distance from work or must work an odd shift, special travel arrangements may have to be made if you do not have a car and cannot depend on public transportation.

In Case of Emergency Notify

Be prepared to give the address and telephone number of a responsible person who can usually be reached, and quickly.

Date Available for Work

For a summer or seasonal job, you probably will need to be available immediately. If you are already employed, at least two-weeks notice should be given to your current employer — more if your contract or company policy calls for it. Leaving a job without notice could hurt you in the future when that employer is contacted as a reference. It may jeopardize your chances to be rehired within the organization.

Condition of Health

If you are in normal health, write "excellent" or "very good." Applications also may ask for the number of days of work you missed because of health problems during the last two years.

Information about surgeries and diseases also may be requested. Your answers will help employers decide whether you can physically do the job.

If you have health problems or physical limitations, the employer can't legally refuse to hire you for that reason, unless it impairs your ability to do the job.

Some firms require a physical examination before you are hired. It may range from a routine check to a comprehensive examination. If the employer requires the exam as a condition of employment, the employer must pay for it.

Education

All education — formal or otherwise — from grade school to the present should be listed. Special courses, such as a computer skills course or a Red Cross safety course, also should be shown. You may be asked to report your class standing, or the subjects in which you received the best grades, if you were graduated in recent years.

Hobbies and Special Skills

Special interests, hobbies, and special skills can show responsibility or initiative, depending upon their complexity. Working with autos or clocks, for example, may help you get a job which requires mechanical aptitude. List any such skills or licenses, such as an ability to operate office machines — even pilot an airplane!

Military Service

If you served in the military, you may be asked to identify your branch of service, your rank, and the dates you entered and were discharged. Also, you may be asked to indicate the type of discharge you received.

If the application form does not ask specifically about your military service, you may want to include it under "Previous Employment." Emphasize those duties you performed which are related to the job for which you are applying.

If you have completed any military service (active or reserve), you may want to volunteer that information if it is not otherwise requested.

Membership in the military reserves or National Guard usually involves regular meetings and summer camp at set time periods over which you and your employer have no control. This could require special arrangements with your employer.

School Activities and Honors

During an interview these factors may count heavily if you lack much actual work experience and you are a recent student. Sports, music, and other activities should be mentioned. Special honors — class president, honor role, team captain, student committees — show a sense of responsibility and achievement. Activities such as chorus, forensics or debate club should be listed also. An interviewer may have a personal interest in one of these areas, and it may serve as an "icebreaker" in the interview.

References

Although interviewers often contact past employers for references, they may ask you to provide personal references (other than relatives). Ministers, teachers, counselors or club leaders may be possibilities. Be

sure to ask their permission ahead of time. Usually the address, occupation, and telephone number of the reference are required on application forms.

Written Evaluation

Some employment applications require a short, handwritten self-evaluation or biographical sketch. Also, you might be asked, "Why do you want this job?" or "Why do you want to work for us?" Prepare a draft statement on another piece of paper before or at the time you complete the application. Organize your points carefully and accurately. Once you have it in shape, you may transfer it to the form. The employer will be looking for legible handwriting, good grammar, and your ability to express yourself.

Willingness to Travel

Although chances are small that persons beginning their careers will have to travel, you may be asked about your willingness to do so, depending on the type of job or the need for travel if you are promoted.

Foreign Language Proficiency

Knowledge of a foreign language could be the deciding factor in getting some jobs, especially jobs that require communication with selected ethnic groups. You should indicate whether you read, write or speak the language, and how well you do each.

Previous Employment Information

Usually, you will be asked to **list your current or most recent job first**, then your next-most-recent, and so on. It is important that you know the names and titles of previous supervisors. Account for the time gaps between employment, and include part-time and volunteer employment. Even painting, cooking, and baby-sitting can count for young adults who have had little other work experience.

In describing the kinds of work you've done, **avoid over- or under-selling yourself**. If you were a "clerk-typist," not just a "clerk," say so. The same is true for "electronic technician" or "X-ray technician." Specific duties should be emphasized, avoiding generalizations. An assembler who also did testing should list both duties.

The reason you quit your last job, or are seeking to leave your current one, generally is asked. This information may be one portion of the application most carefully considered by your potential employer. It could tell many things. For example, are you a "job-hopper" or a griper? Can you stick to one job? Do you avoid responsibility? Can you work with a group?

This pamphlet is based, in part, on an article which appeared in "Occupational Outlook Quarterly," published by the US Department of Labor.

Be truthful in discussing the reason you left previous employers, since reference checks usually will reveal any difficulties experienced on earlier jobs. However, derogatory comments and general phrases such as "poor working conditions," "personality conflict," or "dissatisfaction" should be avoided. Instead, positive (if truthful) descriptions should be used — "chance for greater responsibility," or "chance to work with more skilled craftspeople."

Often you will be asked about your **starting and ending wages** at previous jobs. It is a good idea to know what your wages were by the hour, week, month and year since it may be asked any of those ways.

Closing Statement

Most employment applications end with the statement that any false answers or misrepresentations can be cause for termination. Most misleading information is uncovered during reference checks.

Usually a further statement in this section gives an employer permission to contact past employers — sometimes the present employer. Read this portion carefully since people sometimes do not want present employers to know that they are looking for work.

Signature and Date

Do not forget to sign and date the application. Sounds simple, but experience shows that a significant number of applicants neglect to complete this final portion of the form.

Other Considerations

There are questions which, if found on application forms, could violate laws aimed at achieving equal opportunity, depending on how answers are used.

On the other hand, these same questions sometimes are asked by employers to help them carry out affirmative action programs.

Since you will see the following requests for information on many application forms, it is a good idea to become familiar with them and understand how they may be used legally and illegally.

Arrests and Convictions. Consideration of **arrest** records by employers is unlawful because an arrest does not indicate guilt. You may, however, be asked about convictions. If you do have a conviction record, an employer cannot legally refuse to hire you because of it unless the conviction is directly related to the job for which you are applying.

Sex. The federal Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, except in the rare instances in which sex may be a "bona fide

occupational qualification necessary to the normal operation" of the business. Furthermore, it is illegal to pay a woman less than a man for the same work.

Marital Status. If an employer refuses to hire an applicant because of marital status, the employer is violating the Wisconsin Fair Employment Law. Refusal to hire spouses except when one spouse supervises another, is discriminatory. Also, an employer cannot legally refuse to hire a woman for any job because of the employer's attitudes concerning the woman's family responsibility.

Dependents. Employers may not have different hiring policies for mothers and fathers of pre-school age children.

Friends or relatives employed by the firm. The answer to this question may help friends or relatives of present employees to become employed at the same business place. Such a preference would be unlawful if it has the effect of reducing employment opportunities for women or minorities. Refusal to hire relatives, other than spouses, is not illegal.

Age. It is illegal to discriminate on the basis of age against individuals who are age 40 or over. It is important, however, that employers know the age of applicants under 18 because of child labor laws and other age regulations.

Handicaps. It is illegal to discriminate against handicapped individuals unless it can be proven that the handicap would impair one's ability to do the job.

You are not legally required to answer all the questions on a form to be eligible for the job for which you are applying. You may respond with "Prefer to discuss," or you may leave them unanswered. However, it is generally not a good idea to do so. Some employers may think you have something to hide, and your chances of getting the job may diminish.

If you think an employer has discriminated against you, contact the Equal Rights Division, Department of Workforce Development, 201 E. Washington Avenue, Madison, WI 53707 or 819 N. 6th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53203.

